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THE NEWLY DISCOVERED APOCRYPHAL GOSPEL OF PETER.*

By ISAAC H. HALL, PH.D.
Metropolitan Museum, New York City.

Last month appeared for the first time in print, in Vol. i., fascicle ix. of the *Memoirs of the French Archæological Mission at Cairo*, the newly-discovered fragment of the lost Gospel of Peter, as transcribed by M. U. Bouriant. The publication would seem to be somewhat tardy, as the parchment manuscript from which it is extracted was found in a Christian tomb at Akhmim, the ancient Panopolis, in Upper Egypt, during the winter of 1886-87. In the opinion of the transcriber the writing is not earlier than the eighth nor later than the twelfth century of our era. The same volume has yielded a large portion of the Book of Enoch in Greek, and a fragment of an Apocalypse which M. Bouriant provisionally identified with the lost Apocalypse of Peter. The manuscript is now in the Ghizeh Museum at Cairo.

As soon as the fascicle of the *Memoirs* containing these fragments of the Gospel and the Apocalypse arrived at Cambridge in England,—on the very day,—the text of the Gospel fragment was reprinted at the University Press under the editorship of the Rev. H. B. Swete, whom we all know as the editor of the manual *Cambridge Septuagint* now appearing; and in three days thereafter, on the 20th of November, a lecture upon the Gospel was delivered in the Hall of Christ's College, by Mr. J. Armitage Robinson. At about the same time Mr. Montague Rhodes James, fellow of King's College, who had made special study of this Apocalypse, and foretold in large measure what

* Read at the meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis at New York, Dec. 29, 1892.

its contents would prove to be when found, lectured on the Apocalypse.

This paper was begun when I received and had only the text as edited by Mr. Swete; and much that I would say has since been anticipated by Mr. Robinson, who has also said some things that had not occurred to me. One point I consider so thoroughly made by Messrs. Robinson and James, that I shall spend no time upon it; that is, these fragments are undoubtedly portions of the lost Gospel and Apocalypse, severally, of which we had already heard; and not at all a later fabrication. Mr. James had already found some extracts from the Apocalypse; but it is generally stated by writers hitherto, that no extracts have been preserved from the Gospel; and I am not prepared to disagree with them.

The chief account of Peter's Gospel which we have from antiquity is a letter of Serapion preserved by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccles.* vi. 12). Serapion was Bishop of Antioch from about A. D. 190 to 203; and his letter was addressed to the Church of Rhossus in Cilicia. I give it here in Westcott's translation (*Hist. Canon N. T.*, 390, 391): "We receive both Peter and the other Apostles of Christ; but, as experienced men, we reject the writing falsely inscribed with their names, since we know that we did not receive such from our fathers. Still, I allowed the book to be used, for when I visited you I supposed that all were attached to the right faith; and as I had not thoroughly examined the Gospel which they brought forward under the name of Peter, I said: If this is the only thing which seems to create petty jealousies among you, let it be read. But now since I have learnt from what has been told me that their mind was covertly attached to some heresy, I shall be anxious to come to you again; so brethren expect me quickly. But we, brethren, having comprehended the nature of the heresy which Marcianus held—how he contradicted himself from failing to understand what he said, you will learn from what has been written to you—were able to examine [the book] thoroughly having borrowed it from others who commonly use this very Gospel, that is from the successors of those who first sanctioned it, whom we call

Docetæ (for most of [Marcianus'] opinions belong to their teaching); and to find that the greater part of its contents agrees with the right doctrine of the Saviour, though some new injunctions are added in it which we have subjoined for your benefit."

To this Swete adds the text of the other passages where the book is mentioned, viz.: Origen's *Comm. in Matt.* t. x. 17; Eusebius' mention (H. E. iii. 3) of the fact that it is not received by the Catholics; Jerome's statement (*De Vir. Illustr.* i.) that it is repudiated among the apocryphal writings; and Theodoret's saying (*Haeret. Fab.* ii. 1) that the "Nazaræan Jews are those who honor the Christ as a just man, and have made use of the so-called Gospel according to Peter."

I will now give a *translation of the Gospel; following mainly Swete's text, but noting occasional differences (punctuation or reading) adopted by Robinson. I have not seen the text of Bouriant; but it is very well spoken of by both Swete and Robinson, who give his variants from their own in foot-notes. Very few of these—perhaps none—bear internal evidence of being more probably correct than the text I use.

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PETER.

. . . but of the Jews no one washed his hands, nor did Herod, nor one of his judges, even of those who were minded to wash. Pilate rose up,¹ and then Herod, the King, commands the Lord to be taken, saying to them, What I commanded you to do, do ye to him.

And there had come thither Joseph, the friend of Pilate and of the Lord, and, knowing that they are about to crucify him, he came to Pilate and begged the body of the Lord for burial. And Pilate sent to Herod and begged his body; and Herod said, Brother Pilate, even though no one had begged him, we would bury him, since a Sabbath is drawing nigh; for it is written in the law that the sun shall not go down upon one that has been slain before the first day of unleavened bread—their feast.

And they took the Lord and pushed him as they ran, and said, Let us drag away² the Son of God, since we have obtained authority over him. And they clothed him in purple and set him upon the judgment-seat, saying, Judge righteously, King of Israel. And one of them having brought a crown of thorns put it upon the head of the Lord, and others standing by spit in his

*A revision of that previously published by Dr. Hall in the Independent. [Ed.]

¹ Robinson: And when they were minded to wash, Pilate rose up.

² This is an emendation by J. Rendel Harris. Swete has, We have found

face (or, eyes), and others buffeted his cheeks, others pricked him with a reed, and some scourged him, saying, With such honor as this let us honor the Son of God.

And they brought two malefactors, and crucified the Lord between them; but he himself was silent, as having no pain. And when they set up the cross, they wrote upon it, This is the King of Israel. And having laid his garments before him they divided them, and cast lot for them. But a certain one of those malefactors reviled them, saying, We have suffered thus because of the evil deeds which we did; but this one because he came as Saviour of men. Wherein has he wronged you?¹ And enraged at him they commanded that his legs should not be broken, in order that he might die in torture.

And it was noon, and darkness prevailed over all Judea; and they were troubled, and were in distress lest the sun should go down while he was still alive; for it is written that to them the sun shall not go down upon one who has been slain. And one of them said, Give him to drink gall with vinegar; and they mingled and gave it him to drink. And they fulfilled all, and completed their sins upon their own head. And many went about with lights, thinking that it was night; and some² stumbled. And the Lord cried out, saying, My Power, My Power, thou hast forsaken me! and thus saying, he himself also³ was taken up.

And at the ninth⁴ hour the vail of the temple of Jerusalem was rent in twain. And then they withdrew the nails from the hands of the Lord, and laid him upon the earth; and the whole earth quaked, and there became great fear. Then the sun shone, and it was found to be the ninth hour. But the Jews were glad, and they gave his body to Joseph, that he might bury it, since it had been seen⁵ how many good deeds he had done. And he took the Lord and washed him and wrapped him in fine linen, and brought him into his own sepulchre called the Garden of Joseph.

Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, seeing what mischief they had done to themselves, began to bewail and to say, Woe for our sins! the judgment is at hand, and the end of Jerusalem! But I, with my companions, was grieved, and wounded in our understanding we hid ourselves; for we were sought by them as malefactors and as wishing to burn the temple. And besides all this we were fasting, and we sat mourning and weeping night and day until the Sabbath. But the scribes and Pharisees and elders gathered together with one another, and—having heard that the whole people are murmuring and beating their breasts, saying, If at his death such most great wonders have come to pass, see how righteous he is—the elders were afraid, and came to Pilate entreating him and saying, Give us soldiers

¹ Robinson: But wherein has this one wronged you by coming as the Saviour of men?

² Robinson *omits* some.

³ Robinson *omits* himself also.

⁴ Robinson: And at the same. ⁵ Robinson takes this actively: Since he had seen.

that we may guard his tomb for three days, lest his disciples come and steal him away, and the people suppose that he has risen from the dead, and do us mischief. And Pilate gave them the centurion Petronius with soldiers to guard the sepulchre. And with them came elders and scribes to the tomb, and rolling a great stone, with the centurion and the soldiers, together all those who were there laid it upon the door of the tomb, and smeared upon it seven seals, and pitched a tent there and kept guard. But early in the morning, when the Sabbath was dawning, there came a multitude from Jerusalem and the region about, that they might see the tomb that had been sealed.

But in the night in which the Lord's day dawned, while the soldiers were keeping guard two by two according to their watch, there came a great voice in heaven, and they saw the heavens opened, and two men descending thence, with great splendor, and standing at the sepulchre. And that stone which had been placed upon the door rolled away of itself and withdrew to one side, and the sepulchre was opened, and both the young men went in. Those soldiers, then, seeing, awoke the centurion and the elders, for they also were present keeping guard; and when they had related what they saw, again they see go out from the sepulchre three men, and the two holding upright the one, and a cross following them; and of the two the head reaching to heaven, but of him that was held upright by them,¹ the hand extending above the heavens. And they heard a voice out of the heavens, saying, Thou didst preach to them that are asleep. And answer was heard from the cross, Yea. They consulted therefore one with another to go away and show these things to Pilate. And while they were yet considering, there appear again the heavens opened, and a certain man descending and going into the tomb. Seeing this, the centurion and his band hastened by night to Pilate, leaving the tomb which they were guarding, and related everything which they had seen, in great distress and saying, Truly he was a son of God. Pilate answered and said, I am clear from the blood of the Son of God, but that was what seemed best to you. Then all came forward and entreated him and besought to command the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing of what they had seen; for it is better, they say, for us to be guilty of the greatest sin before God, and not to fall into the hands of the people of the Jews and be stoned. Pilate therefore commanded the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing.

And at dawn of the Lord's day Mary Magdalene, a disciple of the Lord ([who] afraid because of the Jews, did not at the tomb of the Lord that which women are accustomed to do for the dead and those beloved by them), taking her friends with herself came to the tomb where he was laid. And they feared lest the Jews should see them, and they said, Though indeed in that day in which he was crucified we were not able (*i. e.*, allowed) to weep and bewail, yet now over his tomb that we may do. But who will roll away

¹ Robinson: but of him that was led by their hand.

for us also the stone that is laid upon the door of his tomb, so that we may enter in and sit down beside him, and do that which is fitting? For the stone was great, and we fear lest some one see us. And if we be not able, although we may throw upon the door that which we bring in remembrance of him, we shall weep and bewail until we come to our house. And going away they found the sepulchre opened; and going on they stooped down there, and they see there a young man sitting in the midst of the sepulchre, fair, and clothed with a most brilliant robe, who said to them, Why have ye come? Whom seek ye? Is it that crucified one? He is risen and gone away; but if ye do not believe, stoop down and see the place where he lay, that he is not [there]; for he has risen and gone away thither whence he was sent. Then the women were afraid and fled. And it was the last day of unleavened bread, and many went out [from Jerusalem], returning to their homes as the feast came to an end.

But we the twelve disciples of the Lord wept and grieved, and each one, grieving at what had happened, departed to his own house. But I Simon Peter and Andrew my brother took our nets and went away to the sea; and there was with us Levi the son of Alpheus, whom the Lord . . .

A word or two with regard to the vocabulary and phraseology of the fragment is now in order.

A few words seem to be new; at least not found in the lexicons. One is *στανρίσκειν*, near the beginning (the usual one is *στανρώω*); another is *ἀπανιώντες* (from *ἀπανιάω*), a compound with an intensive meaning; another is *σκελοκοπηθῆ*, a verb of which we have the noun at least, if not the adjective. Here is to be mentioned the very rare *λαχμόν*, which is used by Justin Martyr in a like connection. There are uncommon meanings of familiar words, but it is scarcely worth while to enumerate them now.

Otherwise the composition is full of words and phrases borrowed from the four canonical Gospels; and with respect to the distortions and additions in the narrative, we cannot prove that they are taken from any known source, or have any other character than mere amplifications or changes of the New Testament narratives. There occur—and these may be seen noted in the margin of Robinson's text—expressions taken from or certainly suggested by each one of the four canonical Gospels, where the particular Gospel that is the source has no parallel in either of the other three. Besides this are abundant passages

suggested by language or portions of narrative common to more than one, or to all; and there are also expressions very near to some in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and to the passage 1 Peter iii. 19. Robinson finds also reasonable support for the supposition of a harmonistic source of this Gospel of Peter, and is inclined to lay some light stress on its agreements with the supposed Diatessaron of Tatian. But I do not feel sufficiently sure that we have Tatian complete enough or pure enough to base an argument on such an agreement; and I should rather fall back upon the simplicity and artless shape of the composition, and its coincidence with what we know of the character of the hitherto lost Gospel, as well as its just-mentioned apparent source, for proof of its antiquity and identity. But if the Tatian consideration be admitted, it furnishes a date to our book earlier than A.D. 170. Other matters, not yet fully investigated, may push its lowest possible limit at least ten years earlier. But its use of the four Gospels—or of a harmony or diatessaron—shows no difference in estimate among the four; no difference in period or in acceptance between the fourth Gospel and the Synoptists; nor does it at all countenance the supposition of any *Ur-evangelium* still in use in its day, such as we so often feel must underlie the Synoptists; nor does it at all countenance the hypothesis that Mark's Gospel was based on the (lost) Gospel of Peter.

That this fragment is Docetic, seems plain from several considerations. First, the passage, "But he was silent, since he had no pain," can not be interpreted otherwise than as the utterance of one of that sect. So again, although the gall and vinegar are mentioned, the word "I thirst" is omitted; most naturally; for if true, it subverts all Docetism. Yet the composer of this gospel had to excise it from the middle of a passage otherwise almost exactly taken from the words of John. But the most startling passage—based evidently on the view that the Divine Christ came down to the human in form of a dove at the baptism, and departed from him on the cross—is the rendering "My Power, My Power, thou hast forsaken me." Saying nothing about the propriety of this rendering of the Hebrew Psalm—which indeed

is that which Eusebius gives (*Dem. Ev.*, x. 8), in correcting Aquila's "My Strong One"—the writer of this book had to do it in the face of the interpretation of the Evangelists; and that too, although we concede that he must have had a text reading ἡλ instead of ἐλωί. Here again we see a trace of the early period of the composition; for while the earlier Docetae believed in a Divine Christ in a human body, the later ones denied the reality of the body.

This paragraph about the "Power," it should be said, is the only one ever in print before; having been published in an article by Harnack in the *Texte und Untersuchungen* something like a year ago; but it attracted little notice, nor was it of itself enough to show the world that anything of value had been found. The passage is a fearful perversion both of the meaning of the Psalm, where the "Power" can only be the Divine Being; and of the whole scope of the four Gospels (especially Luke's), and of the Acts; as if, forsooth, the "power," with which Christ was endued, then left him and ascended to heaven, whereupon "he also himself was taken up" thither.

The question of the New Testament text witnessed by the readings found in this composition it would be premature to touch at present. I myself am not persuaded that all the allusions are precisely those which others take for granted; and therefore cannot as yet assent to all. But they all show an ancient text. Nor are all its seeming misinterpretations to be condemned as inventions. For instance, where it is said "and they set him on the judgment-seat, saying, Judge justly, King of Israel," there is evidently allusion to John xix. 13, where Pilate, as we have it in our English version, "brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment-seat." But here certain eminent divines have rendered, "and set him on the judgment seat;" and, of itself, that rendering is perfectly legitimate, besides being a consonant preliminary to Pilate's saying to the Jews, "Behold your King."

As to other matters showing the standpoint of the composer of this Gospel, and along with it, that of the sect for whom he wrote it, it is to be noted that the author was no Jew nor lover

of the Jews, and rather inclined to excuse Pilate. The "unleavened bread" is "*their* feast;" not *the* feast; and this note struck at the opening of the fragment rather increases in volume to the end. Pilate is represented as practically subordinate to Herod, as ready to bury Jesus' body, and as a friend of Joseph. But more than one of later apocryphal writings seem inclined to whitewash Pilate. Petronius, by the way, the name of the centurion here, is the name of a disciple of Peter in the Acts of Hermione; but in the other apocryphal writings the centurion is Longinus.

I have not thought it worth while to note the perversions and amplifications here made of the narratives of our four Gospels, nor to try to deduce parallels from the later apocryphal writings. But here and there an amplification occurs which is known of old in our Gospel manuscripts or versions. The "Woe" cried out by the Jews finds its parallel in the current Tatian and in Ephraim's Commentary thereon; the Curetonian Syriac has it, added to Luke xxiii. 48, in this form: "Woe to us! What is this! Woe to us from our sins!" One Latin codex (S. Germ. g.) has: "*Væ nobis, quæ facta sunt hodie propter peccata nostra; propinquavit enim desolatio Hierusalem*" (that is, "Woe to us, the things which have come to pass to-day because of our sins; for the desolation of Jerusalem is come nigh").

The descent into Hades, so prominent in ancient and much modern Christian belief, seems to have been fully accepted here. The remarkable coincidence in thought of the passage, "Thou didst preach to them that are asleep," with one interpretation of 1 Peter iii. 19, strikes the reader at once. Yet there is no filled-out picture of Hades, or of the descent thereto, such as is to be read in sundry compositions. But one thing I note which I have not seen noted elsewhere. The cross following the three coming out of the tomb reminds us of the use of the cross in the descent to Hades as recited in the "Strophes of the Passion" in the Syriac Antiochene liturgy of the feast of the cross. "Thou didst ride the cross when thus wentest forth to bruise the armies of the powers." In this Gospel he would seem to be coming back with that steed following. The Syrian idea of the descent

into Hades is like that of Luther and others, ancient and modern: to meet and overcome the powers of the Devil in his stronghold, as well as liberate the prisoners. In the third part of the Gospel of Nicodemus the narrative of the preaching, and of the liberation of the prisoners, is given at length; the latter being divided off, or punctuated, so to speak, by the closing verses of Psalm xxiv. from "Lift up your heads, O ye gates" to the end; the gates and everlasting doors being the ancient and mighty ones of Hades' and Satan's stronghold, and Jesus the King of Glory. In the course of the narrative, Adam in a gloriose manner upbraids Satan with questions about what he has gained by bringing about the crucifixion; the sign of the cross is the means of release from Hades and the entrance into Paradise; and the cross itself is left set up in Hades as an everlasting sign of victory. But the only actual cross that appears in or after the ascent, is one borne on the shoulders of a lowly man, who meets the liberated array in Paradise, and proves to be the penitent robber crucified with Jesus.

I may say here that Robinson translates the sentence uttered by the voice from heaven as a question: "Hast thou preached to them that sleep?" But to me it seems much finer and fitter to take it as a declaration: "Thou has preached to them that sleep." And response was heard from the cross, "Yea!" Indeed it is hard otherwise to explain the use of *ὑπακοή* which properly means "obedience," "compliance," "submission," but is best translated here by "answer" or "response;" though it is the answer of obedience, beyond a doubt; a response of homage.

We may add just one observation on the textual testimony. The passage which brings the women to the sepulchre is full of clear traces of both John and Mark; but the latter cease with the abrupt ending of Mark's Gospel, with not a hint or trace of the last twelve verses.

There still remains much investigation and work to be done with this fragment; or rather, we should say, the work and investigation have hardly begun. Nor have I touched here upon a multitude of interesting points that present themselves at the very first reading. But it is plain that this is a fragment of the

old Docetist Gospel attributed to Peter; that it links in with matters in every direction that show it to be very ancient: that it gives clear testimony throughout to the existence and undoubted acceptance of the four Gospels, and possibly of other portions of the New Testament; and that it bears the usual historical testimony to the truth that is found in the mouths of ancient heretical forgers.